

## Welcome to the Workplace Physical Activity Resource Kit.

This resource kit provides information for organisations with an interest in workplace physical activities, which may involve:

- developing and implementing a comprehensive workplace physical activity program, OR
- implementing simple workplace initiatives, such as a pedometer program or displaying signage and 'footprints' to increase stair usage.

Regardless of your organisations' type and size, you can incorporate physical activity, simply and often inexpensively, into your organisation.

## Why Be Physically Active?

Undertaking sufficient physical activity is important for everyone. Yet, recent research has found that just over half of South Australian adults undertake enough activity to improve their health.

Being physically active is associated with a range of benefits, including:

- a lower mortality rate and a lower incidence of a range of lifestyle related diseases (e.g. cardiovascular disease, stroke, diabetes, colon cancer, breast cancer, osteoporosis, etc);
- controlled weight, blood pressure and cholesterol, reducing the risk of illness;
- more energy, improvements in sleep, concentration, alertness and self-confidence; and
- less stress, anxiety and depression.



## How Much Physical Activity?

To get these benefits all you need to do is put together at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity (e.g. brisk walking) physical activity on most, preferably all, days.

You can accumulate your 30 minutes (or more) throughout the day by combining a few shorter sessions of activity of around 10 to 15 minutes each.

If you can, also enjoy some regular vigorous activity for extra health and fitness. Vigorous implies activity that makes you 'huff and puff' such as jogging, aerobics or fast cycling<sup>1</sup>.

## Why Promote Physical Activity at Work?

Increases in effort-saving technology have reduced much of the opportunity for human movement in our day-to-day lives. Our dependence on cars has reduced how much we walk. Machines and labour-saving devices carry out work for us both in the workplace and at home. Home entertainment such as TVs, videos, DVDs and computers, can keep us inactive for long periods. In the workplace, increased computer usage (particularly with development of email and the internet), has resulted in a large number of workers sitting for long periods during the day.

Other changes in the workplace have also contributed to people being less active. For example, the nature of work has changed significantly over the last fifty years. Nowadays:

- People generally work longer hours;
- Jobs are significantly more inactive – many employees sit for long periods of time (e.g., sitting in front of computers, answering phones, driving);
- Some employees manage more than one part-time job;
- Most employees have limited leisure time during the work week; and
- Many parents have jobs outside the home, creating more work and home conflicts.

These changes in the nature of work contribute to inactive lifestyles, stress, and alarmingly high rates of preventable diseases.

Because most South Australian adults spend so much time at work, the SA Physical Activity Council and the Government of South Australia has identified the workplace as a central setting for encouraging physical activity.

***According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) workplace physical activity programs can reduce sick leave by up to 32% and increase productivity by up to 52%.***





## A Sound Investment

Many inactive people are employed in organisations such as yours. Besides, introducing workplace physical activity initiatives can produce many benefits to both employers and employees’.

Benefits for the workplace include a reduction in sick days, injuries and therefore less absenteeism and rehabilitation costs<sup>2</sup>. Research indicates that productivity, efficiency and staff morale can increase with the introduction of physical activity. Additionally, our ageing population means that future workforces will, more than likely, consist of a higher proportion of older people. Helping people to be active will enable your workforce remain physically active and healthier for longer.

Participants in physical activity programs report that exercise helps them to:

- Improve their mental concentration, stamina, reaction time and memory;
- Be more alert;
- Experience a better rapport with co-workers; and
- Enjoy work more than non-participants.

Physical activity at work also results in greater employee satisfaction and improved performance.

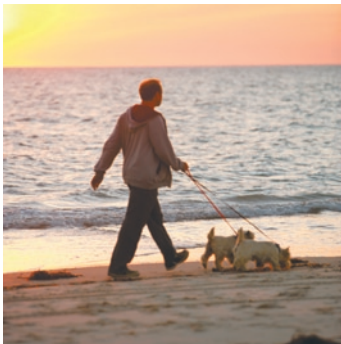
Workplace physical activity initiatives are a good investment as employees’ health is directly related to the costs of sick leave and absenteeism.

Lastly, a workplace that supports employees’ physical activity can also attract and maintain quality employees, improving the social environment and corporate image.

## What can a workplace do to promote physical activity?

There are many ways in which organisations can promote physical activity, some of which are very easy and inexpensive to implement. These include:

- Displaying motivational or informative posters, signage or brochures about the benefits of physical activity and some tips on getting active (see Section 3 ‘Resources’);
- Promoting and encouraging employees to use the stairs. Use the ‘footprint’ stickers to guide people toward the stairs rather than walking straight to the lift;
- Promote ‘walking meetings’, lunch-time walks and 5-10 minute walk breaks during the day (you’ll return a lot more alert!)
- Providing bicycle racks or alternative secure bicycle storage to encourage people to cycle to work;
- Providing information on local opportunities for physical activity. This could include:
  - Publicising physical activity opportunities through email, company intranet or websites, links to the be active website, noticeboards and newsletters;
  - Maps of local walking trails (such as the ‘40 Short Walks’ booklet);
  - Information on sports and recreation facilities and clubs; and
  - Providing advice booklets (such as the ‘Getting Started’ booklet in this kit);



- Purchasing corporate memberships of local fitness centres. Some local fitness centres offer attractive corporate packages which allow employees reduced membership rates;
- Providing on-site facilities such as gyms (this may be an option for large employers);
- Providing showers, change room facilities and lockers for those who wish to cycle, walk or jog to work or participate in more vigorous activities in and around the working day;
- Supporting sports and physical activity clubs such as social football and netball teams, and walking and jogging groups; and
- Encouraging employees to form corporate teams for events such as Corporate Cup, the be active tour and the Masters Games.

## For your organisation consider whether you'd like to:

- a) Develop and implement workplace physical activity programs and policies to support physical activity initiatives. The following section ('Workplace Physical Activity Framework') gives step-by-step instructions and tips for successfully undertaking this process.

OR

- b) Incorporate simple initiatives into your workplace, such as pedometer programs, lunch-time walking groups or initiatives to increase stair usage (rather than developing specific workplace physical activity policies).

To encourage physical activity you could display the posters, flyers, footprints and other resources provided in this kit. Or make information such as active transport options (e.g. bike paths, walking tracks) and corporate active events (e.g. Corporate Cup) part of your employee orientation pack. For more ideas on other activities your organisation could do, refer to the above section ('What can a workplace do to promote physical activity?')

If you would like more information on workplace physical activity, please contact:

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Parts of this document were adapted from the Alberta Centre for Active Living's 'Workplace Physical Activity Framework' ([www.centre4activeliving.ca](http://www.centre4activeliving.ca)) and Health Education Board for Scotland's 'Promoting Physical Activity in the Workplace' ([www.hebs.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.hebs.scot.nhs.uk))

#### **(Footnotes)**

- 1 National Physical Activity Guidelines for Australians, Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing (1999).
- 2 The World Health Organisation (2003) state that workplace physical activity programs can reduce sick leave by up to 32% and increase productivity by up to 52%.

## Workplace Physical Activity Framework

A framework on how to develop and implement comprehensive workplace physical activity programs and policies in your organisation.

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## Part 1. Groundwork

### 1.1 Management & Employee Commitment

When implementing a physical activity program, three groups of people should be committed to increase the success of the program and maximise its effectiveness. These people and the roles they play include:

1. An individual or group of individuals who champion workplace physical activity. These people start the process at their workplace and provide the motivation and drive to meet the goals of a program once it is in place.
2. Management must demonstrate commitment to the program.
3. A representative committee needs to develop a policy on physical activity in the workplace. (Either a new or existing committee could be used).

One of the committee's main functions is to create a physical activity policy that contains:

- A written declaration of the organisations commitment to physical activity;
- Realistic and measurable goals and objectives for the organisations physical activity program;
- An outline of the responsibilities of management, employees, and contractors regarding physical activity at the workplace.

The Chief Executive, Executive Director, Board of Directors or other senior management should then sign and date this policy document.

The next step is to make all employees aware of the policy and its meaning. Include a copy of the policy in the company management systems or other policy manual. This policy can also be part of a larger, already-existing occupational health and safety policy.

### Questions to Ask Yourself

1. Has physical activity been included in organisational policy?
2. Has senior management signed the policy?
3. Is the policy posted at all workplaces?
4. Is the policy discussed during employee orientations?
5. Has the organisation written measurable and achievable goals and objectives for the physical activity program?
6. Does the management communicate the following to workers at least once annually?
  - Why physical activity is important in the workplace.
  - The company's commitment to physical activity.

### 1.2 Environment & Needs Assessments

Part of the initial planning of any physical activity program is to assess employee characteristics and needs. Consider all employees' existing fitness levels and medical conditions (e.g. lower back pain, high blood pressure), as well as demographic characteristics such as age and gender. Factors such as the organisational culture and competing demands (e.g. needs of family versus work) will also affect the physical activity preferences and needs of employees.

In addition, take into account the physical environment, which includes the:

- Time, space, and equipment available for activity;
- Availability of showers and changing facilities; and
- Financial cost of being active.

The goal of your assessment is to determine how and when employees would like to be active and what they expect from a physical activity program.

Once you have assessed the environment and employee needs, then prioritise each need according to its influence on the physical activity program. For example, suppose a large group of employees showed an interest in cycling to work. Since they may want to shower and change after their commute each day, you could provide shower and change room facilities in your workplace. Bike racks would also be important to keep employees' bikes secure during the workday.

### Questions to Ask Yourself

Has the organisation assessed the following in developing physical activity programs?

1. Employee participation in physical activity during or outside of work hours?
2. Characteristics of employees (e.g. age, gender, social relationships)?
3. Employees' preferences in physical activity?
4. Workplace facilities employees can access in order to be physically active (e.g. bike racks, showers/change rooms, lockers)?
5. Workplace physical resources that support physical activity (e.g. are stairwells clean and safe, are the grounds safe and attractive for walking?).

## Part 2. Construction

### 2.1 Knowledge, Attitude & Skills

A workplace physical activity program must provide employees with enough knowledge and skills to begin and maintain physical activity in a safe manner. The program also needs to promote a positive attitude toward physical activity.

Knowledge includes what people know about the benefits of physical activity, how to attain these benefits and where physical activity opportunities exist.

Attitude refers to how people feel about physical activity. Do they consider physical activity important? Do they feel able to be active? Do they want to be active?

Skills are the tools people need to begin and sustain being physically active. These skills might go beyond the ability to perform specific activities (i.e. behaviour) to include time-management strategies and the ability to make physical activity a priority during the workday.

### Questions to Ask Yourself

1. Has the organisation assessed employees' physical activity knowledge, attitudes and skills?
2. Does the workplace provide information to educate employees about the benefits of physical activity?
3. Are there various physical activity program options?

### 2.2 The Social Level

The social level includes both the relationships in existing social groups and the building of new groups. This level takes into account relationships within the workplace, as well as those outside (e.g. family and friends).

Inside the workplace, you need to examine the supportive climate within individual departments, among departments, and between employees and their supervisors. Additionally, the interactions between the program providers and individuals must be positive.

Champions have a key role to play in setting positive examples and recognising successes.

Outside the workplace, social demands may also influence behaviour. For example, consider the influence of family members on participation in a physical activity program (such as the need for child care). Examples of activities that can work at a social level are corporate challenges, company tournaments etc.

### Questions to Ask Yourself

1. Is there a positive social/cultural climate that encourages being active in the workplace?
2. Do employees perceive support for physical activity from co-workers?
3. Do supervisors or management demonstrate their support for employee physical activity?
4. Does the physical activity program include families (or was this considered during the planning process)?

## 2.3 The Organisational Level

The organisational level refers to the influence of the organisational structure on current and ongoing participation in physical activity. This level includes management leadership, support and participation as well as physical activity champions who will lead from the 'bottom-up'. Champions at the management level help to ensure that a program is maintained, even in times of cutbacks.

The organisation must also be able to implement and sustain a physical activity program. In other words, organisational capacity is defined through will and infrastructure. The will is the organisations desire and commitment to accomplish a specific goal. The infrastructure includes the human, technical and support resources in place in the organisation.

Workplace integration and equity also fall into this category. Physical activity program policies and procedures should ensure that all employees have equal access to appropriate program opportunities. For example, night-workers might have different needs than day workers. As well, supervisors should be active alongside employees, rather than being segregated. Organisations with many different work locations need to assess each workplace separately to make sure that the program is accessible in all workplaces.

### Questions to Ask Yourself

1. Does the infrastructure (e.g. resources/funds) in the organisation support employee physical activity?
2. Do workplace leaders promote physical activity for employees?
3. Is there a will or desire in the organisation to promote staff physical activity?
4. Is there at least one champion of physical activity at the workplace who can motivate action (i.e. someone to support and promote activities?)
5. Does the organisation recognise employees who champion physical activity?
6. Are opportunities for physical activity available to all employees (e.g. shift, contract, and part-time workers and workers at different locations?)
7. Are accommodations made for employees with special needs (e.g. people with visual or physical impairments, people who speak English as a second language)?

## 2.4 The Community Level

The community level refers to relationships among:

- Different departments within one organisation;
- Multi-sites of the same organisation; and
- The organisation and external organisations or groups.

A large organisation needs to recognise the different needs of its various departments. For example, programs might require different schedules so that each group can be active during work. The same might be true for an organisation with multiple locations. Again, the needs of one geographical location might differ from those in another location (e.g. metropolitan versus regional).

Each organisation should examine ways to connect with other organisations and community-based services to provide physical activity or even the space to be physically active. Collaborations among government agencies, other corporations and unions can also help support the program.

### Questions to Ask Yourself

1. Have the needs of various departments and/or geographical locations been considered in planning the physical activity program?
2. Has the organisation accessed any community-based services (e.g. a local recreation centre) to support the program?
3. Does the workplace use physical activity information from external resources?

## **2.5 The Policy Level**

The policy level includes the organisational policies related to supporting and facilitating workplace physical activity. Issues might include:

- Allowing time for physical activity;
- Formally recognising participation in programs;
- Commuting/active transportation policies;
- Qualified personnel for the program;
- Involving all employees, including contract staff and shift workers.

On a broader level, consider any legislation that may impact workplace physical activity when planning, implementing and evaluating a workplace physical activity program.

## **Questions to Ask Yourself**

1. Do the organisations policies or procedures promote and/or support physical activity for employees (e.g. allowing flexi-time)?
2. Does the organisation formally recognise employees who participate in physical activity?
3. Does the organisations policies encourage commuting to and from work (e.g. are employees allowed time to change before work if they make up the time later in the day)?

## Part 3: Detailing

### 3.1 Program Administration

Good program administration ensures quality (in terms of program delivery and management) and makes it possible to measure success. Program administration includes the programs design, implementation and evaluation.

- Design: Includes facility use and the activities involved in the program.
- Implementation: Involves recruiting of program participants and leading the activities.
- Evaluation: Can include individual evaluations (e.g. attitudinal changes and gains of strength, aerobic capacity and flexibility), satisfaction levels, indicators of productivity gains (e.g. decreases in absenteeism due to injury and illness, increased morale) and attendance statistics.

### Questions to Ask Yourself

1. Does the organisation keep records of workplace physical activity initiatives?
2. Does the organisation evaluate the physical activity program at least once a year?
3. Is there an action plan to deal with the results of this evaluation?
4. Have employees been asked provide feedback on the physical activity initiatives?
5. Does the organisation distribute the evaluation results to all employees and management?

### 3.2 Safety & Risk Management

Developing safety and emergency policies and procedures is important so that every physical activity program can anticipate and respond to any emergency. This preparation reduces the risk of loss, both to individuals and your organisation.

Risk management plans are not necessarily complicated or expensive. For example, part of the plan might require that employees complete fitness appraisals and sign statements accepting the possible risks involved in physical activity.

Making sure that program staff is adequately trained and that necessary first-aid supplies and services are available can also help ensure safe activity. In addition, regularly assess the physical environment to identify broken equipment and unsafe conditions and facilities.

### Questions to Ask Yourself

1. Does the organisation have a risk management plan?
2. Are emergency response procedures posted?
3. Does the first-aid supplies/services and facilities meet the requirements of first-aid regulations?
4. Are all incidents reported?
5. Does the organisation take steps to prevent incidents happening again?
6. Does the organisation carry out regular inspections of equipment and facilities?

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